



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Statement of Subcommittee Chairwoman Martha McSally (R-AZ) Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee

"Boots at the Border: Examining the National Guard Deployment to the Southwest Border"

July 24, 2018

Remarks as Prepared

After Chairing this subcommittee over the past two and a half years, leading many hearings, visiting the different regions of the southern border, and spending time at the border in my state with ranchers, Homeland Security Secretary Nielsen, Border Patrol Agents and local law enforcement, I am confident when I say that border security, is national security.

We continue to see growing levels of illegal drugs, dangerous gang and transnational criminal organization activity, as well as illegal immigration flow, across our Southwest Border. This not only poses a threat to our communities and families but also our rule of law.

When our borders are not respected, our sovereignty is not respected. That is why we need a multi-faceted approach to border security that the Department continues to reiterate, including a combination of border wall, technology, access and personnel using intelligence driven ops to detect and intercept the illicit flow.

Today, our focus is on personnel, and their capabilities at the border.

Staffing shortages at both the ports of entry and in the Border Patrol are exacerbated by both a hiring process that takes far too long and retention challenges that have persisted for years, with no signs of abatement.

CBP is critically understaffed and remains well below its congressionally mandated staffing levels by more than 1,000 CBP Officers and 1,900 Border Patrol Agents.

Combined with the growing crisis along the Southwest Border, this shortage has put our Nation's security at risk.

In April, President Trump announced the deployment of the National Guard to help secure the Southwest Border. A decision I wholeheartedly support. Such a deployment is not a new concept. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the National Guard have a longstanding successful working relationship due to cooperation on counter-drug task forces as well as through past operational deployments to the border.

The number of illegal border crossings leading up to the April announcement shows an urgent need to address the ongoing situation at the border. We witnessed a 207 percent increase from March 2017 compared to March 2018, and a 244 percent increase from April 2017 compared to April 2018.

Over the last three months, National Guardsmen and women have been operating along the border to help execute logistical and administrative support, operate sensor and imaging detection systems, provide mobile communications, augment border-related intelligence analysis efforts, build and install border security infrastructure, and other functions.

The National Guard deployment allows the opportunity to put badges back on the border so they can enforce the law, and interdict and apprehend those who are illegally crossing.

This support can also help CBP process people and goods faster at our ports of entry, freeing up our highly-skilled Officers to conduct law enforcement interviews and inspections instead of handling logistical and administrative duties.

Governor Doug Ducey in my home state of Arizona was one of the first Governors to answer the President's call and today, 657 Arizona personnel support Operation Guardian Support. However, these operations are not just the responsibility of the four Southwest Border States – this is a national mission and it is appropriate that everyone pitch in to reinforce our defense of the homeland. I am happy to see that National Guard units from across the Nation have contributed by sending helicopters, personnel, and other resources to support the Southwest Border security mission.

For decades, the Department of Defense has been a key partner in supporting CBP's border security efforts. The brave men and woman of DHS have worked tirelessly along with their DOD counterparts in the name of defending the homeland, and I want to thank them for their sacrifices. Your service is not lost on us.

The Department of Defense has, and I suspect, will continue to play an important role in helping us secure the border into the future. For that reason, we need to make sure they have some certainty about funding and even further, we need to take a long hard look at their continued assistance with homeland defense activities in the long-term.

Though the National Guard helps alleviate the staffing shortages at the border, we cannot continue to surge our citizen soldiers and their resources for a brief period of time, then recall them shortly after and expect that whatever gains are made won't deteriorate once these assets return home. We need to have a post-surge plan to sustain operations, increase situational awareness, and gain operational control of the border.

In addition to being the chair of this subcommittee, I am one of nine Members of Congress who represents a border district. My constituents have waited too long for Washington DC to provide the resources, strategy, manpower required to secure the border and stop the cartel activity in our communities.

Today we are here to examine the deployment of National Guard personnel to the Southwest Border, their ability to enhance CBP operations in Texas and Arizona, specific duties of National Guard troops, and coordination efforts between DHS and DOD.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their time and I look forward to hearing their testimony.

With that, I will yield to the Gentleman from Texas, Mr. Vela, for any statement he would like to give.

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